

Case Study 5: DEGENERATIVE DISC DISEASE



Application

The Initial Interview Report can be seen as a “**SNAPSHOT**” of the client’s current situation. The counselor & other rehab team members can review it throughout the rehab process for easy, one-page reference. For example, you can attach it to your referrals for vocational services to quickly familiarize providers with the client’s situation. Likewise, it’s important that you, the writer, accurately *tell the client’s story*.

INITIAL INTERVIEW

Pedro

04/11/05

Reason for Referral: Pedro is a 51-year-old male referred to this agency by the local job service for assistance in retraining and securing employment.

Program Notifications: Prior to proceeding with the interview, Pedro was provided information regarding the purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation, eligibility criteria, his rights, responsibilities, and remedies. He was provided with a written copy of such information for his review. Given his limited English reading skills, however, all information was verbally reviewed with Pedro.

Reported Disability: When asked to describe his disability, Pedro reported that he lives with a “bad back” exacerbated by injury and life long work as a laborer. In January of 2003, Pedro suffered a large herniated disc of the lumbar spine when he caught a snag tree to prevent it from falling on a co-worker. He underwent surgery and was advised by his physician to seek out lighter duty work. He continues to have radiculopathy.

Work History: Pedro, an immigrant from Mexico, went to work as a migrant farm worker at the age of 14. Along with his family, Pedro worked farms across the US until he was 32 years old. He then worked for 11 years as a timber cutter for a variety of logging companies in the Northwest. Desiring less seasonal employment, Pedro secured year round employment as a tree cutter for a mine company where he worked for 7 years until he was injured. Pedro received Work Comp and has not worked for the past two years.

Functional Limitations/Impediments to Employment: When asked, Pedro reported that he can no longer repetitively bend, lift, and carry a chainsaw for an eight to ten hour shift. He is unable to hold the chainsaw for prolonged periods, often in a bent-over position, to make cuts.

Educational History: Given his family’s migrant status, Pedro did not receive a formal education. His first language is Spanish. He is able to converse quite readily in English, but his English reading and writing skills are limited. He is able to read road signs to navigate, and is able to write basic demographic information about himself, but would have great difficulty accurately completing a job application. He often relied on his children, who received sporadic education by itinerant teachers on rural farms, to read important documents.



Don't know what
"radiculopathy" is?
Look it up!

Information is key for
clients & counselors!

Use your resources:
<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/vocrehab/vrs/disabilityresourcecenter.shtml>



A skilled counselor
will effectively
solicit information
from clients
through open-ended
questions and then
reflect the “client’s
voice” in case notes
with direct quotes.

Social and Financial Considerations: Pedro lives with his eldest daughter and her family. His wife passed away from cancer one year ago. After losing his job and his wife, Pedro, who received very meager work comp support was unable to meet his expenses, and found himself on the verge of homelessness. Reluctantly, he moved in with his daughter who insisted so that he could recover from his grief and injury. Pedro is uncomfortable with receiving assistance from his daughter and desires to return to work. He states, "I am a man who needs to work. I do not want to be a disgrace to my family."

Client's Reported Vocational Interests and Goals: When asked what kind of work he'd like to do Pedro expressed uncertainty. To help Pedro uncover possible interests, we discussed his daily activities. He explained that he often chauffeurs his daughter's children to and from their extra curricular activities. *"I like getting out of the house and being useful."* he says. When asked if he likes to drive, he stated, *"I'm a good driver, never had an accident."* We then discussed possible driving jobs, especially those that might exist on or near a construction site, an environment in which Pedro is familiar. When asked if the prolonged sitting would bother him, he replied, *"If it starts to bother me, I could take a small break and walk around a bit."*

Counselor Observation and Actions: Pedro, who appears older than his stated age, presents himself in a courteous manner. He arrived clean and casually dressed and was observed to be soft-spoken, but forthright in his answers.

A release for current medical information was completed. Once received, it will be reviewed to determine Pedro's eligibility for services.

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor



Eligibility Determination

The VR counselor determines eligibility by always asking a series of **KEY QUESTIONS**:

1. Is there evidence of a physical or mental disability?
2. Does the disability prove to be an impediment to employment? In other words, does the disability interfere with the individual's ability to prepare for, secure, and maintain suitable employment?
3. Does the individual *require* services to prepare for, secure, and maintain employment?

The Certificate of Eligibility is documented proof that the questions have been asked and answered.

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY

05/11/05

Pedro has a substantial impediment to employment in that the functional limitations resulting from disability (degenerative disc disease with radiculopathy; status post laminectomy of L5-S1) significantly interferes with his ability to return to work as a laborer. Specifically, Pedro is no longer able to repetitively bend, lift and carry a chainsaw as was required of him in his work as a timber cutter. Furthermore, he is unable to repetitively bend and pick produce as was required of him in his work as a farm worker.

Pedro requires Vocational Rehabilitation Services, including the following:

1. **Possible Retraining**
2. **Selective Job Placement Assistance**

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

LETTER OF ELIGIBILITY

May 11, 2005

Dear Pedro:

I'm writing to inform you that you are eligible for services to help you prepare for and secure employment. Our next step is to meet and begin the development of your rehabilitation plan. I've scheduled an appointment for us to meet on: **Thursday, May 20 at 10 AM**. If this time is not convenient for you, please call the office (123-4567) to reschedule.

To familiarize you with the process, I've enclosed a copy of the format for the "Individualized Plan for Employment (IEP), and the introduction to the plan entitled, "VR and Client Understandings," which outlines the process to write an IEP, your responsibilities and your rights. You do not have to complete the plan prior to meeting with me. We can work on it together.

Pedro, I look forward to meeting with you.

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor



Certification reflects evidence that:

- ☐ The eligibility determination occurred within 60 days of application date.
- ☐ A physical or mental impairment proves to be substantial impediment to employment.
- ☐ At least one significant service is required to overcome impediment to employment.



Assessment & Planning

In this phase, we help clients engage in exploration to help them discover their **DESTINATION** (vocational goal) and the **PROVISIONS** (services and supplies) they require to get there.

CASE NOTE

Pedro

05/20/05

Pedro was in today, as scheduled, to begin the development of his rehabilitation plan. Since our first appointment he has been chewing on the idea of becoming a truck driver, but he uncertain if he can pass the CDL exam. This counselor is concerned about Pedro's ability to endure the prolonged sitting without further exacerbating his condition. To help Pedro make an informed decision, counselor suggested that Pedro undergo both functional capacity and vocational evaluations to determine his sitting tolerances, to confirm his ability to work as a driver, and/or to help him identify an alternative vocational direction. Pedro is in agreement with this suggestion and is scheduled to begin his evaluations at the Rehabilitation Center on June 3, 2005.

Evaluation Staffing Date: **June 7, 2005 at 9 AM**

A referral packet including a signed release, pertinent medial and social information was completed and forwarded to the Rehab Center on this date.

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor



What are the resources for Vocational Evaluations in your area? What's the referral process?



Managing essential information for many clients is a challenge! One way to draw attention to essential information is to use highlighting in your case notes. Notice how Clyde highlights the date of the next appointment at the end of all case notes. With a quick glance he knows when he'll next meet with the client and so will his supervisor who may be reviewing the case or standing in for him in his absence.

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION STAFFING

Pedro

06/07/05

Pedro, the vocational evaluator, the physical therapist and this counselor met today to review the results and recommendations of Pedro's evaluation. The physical therapist states that Pedro was able to sit for up to 2 hours at a time, which would enable him to work as a driver as long as he could take brief stretch breaks every 2 hours. Given his lifting restrictions, however, Pedro is only able to drive water, dump, or no-touch-freight trucks. To help Pedro prevent further injury to his back, the therapist suggested that Pedro participate in physical therapy geared to improve his trunk strength and stability and to learn healthy body mechanics. Pedro is in agreement with this suggestion stating, "I'll do what you say to prevent more surgery!" Lastly, she recommends that Pedro use an Air Ride seat to provide support and comfort while driving.

While Pedro's English reading and writing skills are limited, the vocational evaluator believes that Pedro, who passed the regular driver's exam, could pass the CDL exam with some tutoring from an instructor who is proficient with English as a second language.

He may also require some on-the-job instruction to ensure he is able to effectively and accurately complete the driving logs.

Lastly, we discussed alternative occupations, but Pedro is insistent that he wants to drive. It fits his preference for work that is outdoors and independent. Even though Pedro demonstrated that he can sit for up to 2 hours at a time, this counselor expressed concern about any prolonged sitting knowing that it is not conducive to good back health. Pedro pledges he will do his exercises and take stretch/walk breaks to keep his back healthy.

Pedro is familiar with two CDL training programs in the area. He will tour the facilities and interview the staff prior to our next appointment.

Next Appointment: **June 20 at 1 PM**

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

RATIONALE FOR GOAL AND SERVICES

Pedro
06/20/05

VOCATIONAL GOAL: Pedro has chosen to work as a dump truck or water truck driver.

CLIENT PERSPECTIVE: Pedro states, "I like to drive and it's something I can physically do. It's a good job for me."

Pedro toured both CDL training facilities and has decided to go with Big Wheels Training Center because they have a Hispanic instructor with whom Pedro felt comfortable, and because they offer their own placement services. They place 100 % of their graduates.

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK: According to the Department of Labor, construction companies and mining companies both hire water and dump truck drivers, respectively. With the increased economic growth and construction in this area, this occupation is expected to grow as well.

GOAL COMAPTIBILITY: Given Pedro's expressed interests, his demonstrated abilities, his commitment to engage in back health exercises, and the employment outlook noted above, it appears Pedro has selected a suitable vocational goal.

SERVICE RATIONALE: To achieve his goal, Pedro requires physical therapy to learn healthy body mechanics, training to help him prepare for and pass the CDL exam. When offered a choice, Pedro chose Better Bodies PT and Big Wheels Training Center.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION: Pedro, who lives on public assistance, is unable to contribute to his training expenses.

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor



The Rationale document demonstrates that the counselor has considered the feasibility of the IPE strategy to overcome impediments. It provides evidence that...

- Pedro's goal is compatible with his expressed interests, concerns, priorities, demonstrated strengths, abilities, and that...
- Pedro *requires* the identified services to achieve his goal, and that...
- Pedro was provided information enabling him to make an "informed choice" regarding his services and the vendors with whom he chose to work.



IPE Initiation & Follow Along

The IPE is the **ROAD MAP** to the client's goal or destination. It outlines the route (what the client and the VR program will do to the client achieve his goal) and the ETA (estimated time of arrival or goal end date). Clients and counselors can avoid getting lost with frequent referral to the map!

INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT

Name: *Pedro*

Plan Date: *06/20/05*

My work goal: *Dump/Water Truck Driver*
12/31/05

Date to complete goal:

We have agreed the following services are required:

Service(s)	Responsible Party	Amount	Provider(s)	Dates of Service(s)
Vocational Training	VR	\$2000	Big Wheels Training Center	06/05-09/05
Physical Therapy	VR	\$250	Better Bodies Physical Therapy	06/05-09/05

Additional community and financial resources I will use to help me achieve my work goal: *None at this time.*

My responsibilities in showing progress toward my work goal:

- I will attend all classes and will achieve the minimum passing grade of 75% or better on both the written and driving exams by 09/30/05.*
- I will meet with my physical therapist every Monday for 4 weeks to learn and practice good body mechanics and strengthening exercises. Once I'm working, I will take breaks every 2 hours to stretch and walk to prevent further injury to my back.*

Schedule for Reviewing Progress:

Once I've completed my training and passed my exam, I will meet with Clyde and provide a copy of my CDL certificate for my file. I will then meet with Clyde once every 60 days to keep her informed of my job status. When I get a job I will notify Clyde immediately. One employed, I understand that my case will remain open for 90 days to ensure my job satisfaction and success.

First review appointment: *September 30, 2005*



An IPE that is accountable to the Rehab Act provides evidence that...

- ☐ all services are prior authorized and provided within the timeframe specified by the service start dates and the *goal* end date...
- ☐ comparable benefits and resources are explored...
- ☐ client responsibilities (objectives) are written in clear and measurable terms...
- ☐ Progress Review Schedule is clear, adherence to which will be reflected in subsequent Case Notes...

INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT

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VR Counselor Considerations:

1. Are Post Employment Services needed? YES ☐ NO ☒
2. Are Extended Employment Services needed? YES ☐ NO ☒ NA ☐
If Extended Employment Services are needed, please describe the required services and identify the extended services provider.
3. Have VR goals, objectives and services been coordinated with the student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)? YES ☐ NO ☐ NA ☒

Methods for providing or procuring goods and services: The Vocational Rehabilitation program can provide vocational services directly. In addition, the agency can use purchase orders to procure goods and services from approved vendors. The bidding process is used when appropriate to purchase goods at the best available price. Comparable benefits, when available (resources from other programs or agencies), are utilized to meet rehabilitation needs. All services are provided in accordance with the Financial Need Standard specified by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

My comments about this plan:

"I like to drive and it's something I can physically do. It's a good job for me."

By signing this document I understand and commit to the responsibilities in my Plan. I have been given the opportunity to make informed choices about my work goal, the vocational services needed to achieve it, providers of the goods and services, and the methods available for procuring the services. I received a copy of this Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) in a format that was understandable and appropriate for me.

If applicable, I was offered the opportunity to assign my **Ticket to Work** to Vocational Rehabilitation. YES ☐ NO ☐ NA ☒

Client: Pedro

Date: 062005

Counselor: Clyde Caring

Date: 06/20/05

- ☐ the client was informed of the availability of Post Employment Services ...
- ☐ Extended Employment Services, if applicable, were addressed ...
- ☐ VR coordinated services with school personnel to assist students who are transitioning from school to work & that there was opportunity to complete an IPE before graduation...
- ☐ the client was involved in the development of the IPE (see "My comments..") and that...
- ☐ the IPE was developed within 120 days of date of application, or if not the case record justifies an extension of plan development time.

PROGRESS REVIEW

Pedro

09/30/05

Pedro was in today as scheduled with a copy of his certificate of completion. This counselor congratulated Pedro on his success. The job placement person at Big Wheels training center is looking for a driving position that does not exceed his limitations. Pedro is feeling impatient, but understands how important it is for him to only accept a position that will not compromise his back health. He will keep me posted.

Next Review Appointment: **November 27, 2005 at 2 PM**

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

CASE NOTE

Pedro

10/12/05

Pedro phoned today to inform me that he has secured a water truck driving position with Cross Continental Construction, a highway construction firm. He will work full time, earning \$8/hour to start. He'll receive a raise and benefits (medical insurance and vacation time) at 6 months. He's thrilled stating, "I'm grateful to be back to work!" When asked, Pedro informs me that the employer is aware of his limitations and informed Pedro that all of their trucks are outfitted with Air Ride seats. Pedro is scheduled to begin work on Monday, 10/15/05. I've encouraged him to call if he has any questions or concerns about the job. Given his work schedule, Pedro and I will not be able to meet in person. Therefore, we've scheduled a phone appointment to discuss Pedro's progress on his new job. Pedro will call the office.

He has completed all but one of his physical therapy appointments. He reports, "Making my stomach stronger is making me more confident that I won't hurt my back again."

Phone Review Appointment: **January 15, 2006 at 12 Noon**

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor



Rehabilitation Outcome

In a successful case closure (26), the client's achievement of her goal and VR's contributions to that accomplishment are documented. In this case, a congratulatory handshake is in order! Sometimes, however, despite our best efforts, successful outcomes don't always occur. Sometimes clients relocate & other times life circumstances interfere. Either way, a respectful and courteous exchange between client & counselor, wherein the client knows she is welcome to reapply, is always desirable.

CLOSURE SUMMARY

Pedro

01/15/2006

Pedro did not call today as was scheduled. Counselor called his place of employment and was informed that Pedro injured himself at work and went home. Counselor phoned Pedro at home, leaving message with his grandson.

Pedro phoned later today apologizing for not calling earlier. He was at the clinic. He explained that he cut his hand on a gate when he was opening it to allow his truck to pass through. *"It just up and bit me!"* he good-naturedly exclaimed. He was instructed by his employer to go to the clinic for a tetanus shot and return to work tomorrow.

When asked about his new job Pedro reported, *"I believe it's a good job for me. They are kind people to work for. I did not want to leave work today, it was just a minor cut, but the boss insisted. I like the job. No worries."* Pedro is working 40 hours per week earning \$9/hour. When he works overtime, he is given time and a half. He assures me his back is doing well and that he is committed to doing his exercises.

With his income he is able to give money to his daughter, which pleases him. Given his successful employment and his need for no further services at this time, Pedro and this counselor agreed to close his case. Pedro expressed gratitude for the services provided him stating, *"I thank you for your help. Gracious."*

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

CLOSURE LETTER

January 15, 2006

Dear Pedro:

I'm glad I was able to visit with you today on the phone. I'm very pleased to hear that you like your new job. Once again, congratulations!

Through your own hard work and the services provided to you by this agency, you have successfully completed your CDL training and gotten a job. Now that you've maintained your employment for 90 days and you don't need any further services, we agreed to close your case. However, please remember that you are welcome to contact me for assistance should you have any difficulties related to your disability or continued employment. Assistance may be provided through the Post Employment Services Program.

Pedro, I wish you the very best.

Sincerely,

Clyde Caring, MS, CRC
Rehabilitation Counselor

PS Keep that back healthy and watch out for those gates that bite!

Cc APPEAL RIGHTS



Case documents such as a [Closure Summary](#) and/or the [Closure Letter](#) must provide evidence that...

- ☐ the client achieved the goal outlined in the IPE and that the goal remains suitable...
- ☐ the client expressed satisfaction with the job in a direct consultation between the client and the counselor and is in agreement with case closure...
- ☐ services made a significant contribution to the achievement of the goal...
- ☐ the client has maintained the job for at least 90 days...
- ☐ the client is earning a customary wage and that the client is being compensated at or above minimum wage, and that...
- ☐ the client has been informed of Post Employment services.